TWENTY-ONE FACTS ABOUT THE FIRST FOLIO

1. The First Folio was printed in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare’s death.

2. It was published in London by Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount, and was printed in the print shop belonging to father and son, William and Isaac Jaggard.

3. Before 1623, 19 of Shakespeare’s plays were published in quartos—small books made from folding large sheets of paper in quarters. These volumes were printed on inexpensive paper and sold unbound; they were not intended to last. Quarto editions of Shakespeare’s plays are rare just like the folios.

4. A folio is a term for a large book made by folding the sheets of paper only once. Folio is also a word used to describe the approximate size of a book—a big book. The folio format was usually reserved for royal, religious, or reference documents.

5. Shakespeare’s First Folio was the first folio ever published in England devoted exclusively to plays. Plays were not considered literature at that point in time.

6. Assembling the plays and printing the First Folio was a complicated and expensive project.

7. The First Folio contains more than 900 double-columned pages, an engraved portrait, and several prefatory letters and poems.

8. It was put together by two of Shakespeare’s friends and acting colleagues — John Heminge and Henry Condell.

9. At least five composers—the guys who set the type in the printing house—worked on the First Folio over a two-year period. They were not scholars but average tradesmen—and they could read.

10. Martin Droeshout created the iconic portrait of Shakespeare on the title page of the folio when he was 22 years old. While there is no evidence that Droeshout met Shakespeare, his engraving was approved by Shakespeare’s colleagues John Heminge and Henry Condell. As a result, this image is one of two depictions considered to be a true likeness of Shakespeare. The other is this bust on his grave monuments Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon.

11. The First Folio contains 36 plays and, for the first time, groups them into comedies, histories, and tragedies.

12. In the First Folio, the plays are printed one right after another; *The Tempest* is the first.
13. *Troilus and Cressida* appears in the First Folio, but is not listed in the Table of Contents.

14. Eighteen of the plays had not appeared in print before the First Folio was printed. So we would not have *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Winter’s Tale*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Coriolanus*, *Cymbeline*, and several other plays were it not for this book.

15. *Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Pericles* are not in the First Folio. We don’t know exactly why. Perhaps it’s because Shakespeare collaborated on these two plays and, in 1623, he was not yet considered the author.

16. The notation on the title page that these plays are “Published according to the True Original Copies” seems to indicate that producers of this Folio want the readers to know that these plays are “the real thing” and not unauthorized versions.

17. Scholars generally believe that about 750 copies of the First Folio were printed in 1623.

18. In 2016, we know where 233 First Folios are in the world; 82 are in the Folger Shakespeare Library collection. The second largest collection—12 copies—is at Meisei University in Tokyo.

19. Because of the way in which the First Folios were printed and have been handled over the ages, no two First Folios are alike.

20. A finished First Folio in a calf skin binding cost about £1 in 1623, which today roughly equals between $150-$200. In 2001, a First Folio sold at Christie’s for just over $6.1 million. The most recent sale was in 2006, when a First Folio sold at Sotheby’s for $5.2 million.

21. Since we have not found any manuscript copies of the plays written in Shakespeare’s handwriting, the First Folio is the closest thing we have to the plays as Shakespeare wrote them.